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# WEED LAKE BRIDGE

Government Contracts  
*and*  
Political Methods



## WEED LAKE BRIDGE

On November 7, 1914, the Parsons Construction Company at Regina was asked to submit a tender for a 100 foot arch concrete bridge, over Weed Lake, south of Broadview. No competitive tenders were sought from other contractors. Two days later the Parsons Company wrote to Mr. F. J. Robinson, chairman of the Highways Board, offering to construct the bridge for \$34,533, and attaching to their tender a schedule of unit charges. A few days after receipt of this tender the Government decided to change the design of the bridge to a three-span bridge on piers. No formal contract had been entered into when the change was determined upon, and there is grave suspicion that the schedule of unit prices and the tender sum were excessive.

On November 20th, 1914, the Parsons Construction Company wrote to the Highways Department that having looked over the new plans they expected that the cost of excavations, cofferdams, etc., would be almost doubled. No contract had at that date been entered into with the Construction Company and no competitive tenders were called for the more elaborate bridge. Nevertheless on December 2, 1914, a contract was entered into by the Parsons company to erect the bridge at prices in excess of those named in their original tender. For example, in the original tender there was a lump sum set down for overhead charges of \$5,000; this was increased in the tender accepted on December 2nd to \$12,500. In the schedule of prices of the original tender no special price appeared for wet excavation over ten feet. In the amended tender a special price of \$20 per cubic yard was fixed for such excavation. The price for concrete below the line was fixed at \$10 as the unit in the original tender. This was increased to \$15 in the amended tender.

It is apparent, therefore, that the Parsons Construction Company fixed their own prices for the work and were subsequently allowed to increase these prices without competitive tenders being asked.

On November 30, two days before the contract was entered into and ten days after the Parsons Construction Company had "looked over the plans" the first progress estimate was passed and the Construction Company received a first payment of \$1,500 for excavation work.

In the contract entered into between the Construction Company and the Highways Department on December 2 the usual clause providing for the payment of the inspector's wages by the contractor was struck out.

Progress estimates for excavation were passed and paid on December 17th, 1914, amounting to \$2,500 and on January 4, 1915, to \$5,000. On the latter date work for the winter apparently stopped for there is no record of any further progress estimate being made until May 5th. There is no record on file in the Highways Department of any report showing the quantities of work done and passed by the inspector on the job during this winter period.

The last progress estimate for the embankment was made on September 16th when the total amount of earth excavated was shown at 17,627 yards. Of this amount according to the Progress Estimates 4,500 yards was done in the winter and 13,127 during the summer period. Yet the job was let at winter prices although nearly three times as much was done in the summer as in the winter.

The price for this excavation set by the Parsons Construction Company without tender was 75-cents per cubic yard. The average haul was 1,000 feet down grade from an easily worked hill of clay loam. Engineers contend that from 18 to 23 cents per cubic yard would have been a fair price for this haul. If these figures are correct the Government overpaid the Construction Company over \$7,500 on this item alone.

Not content with these high prices, the Parsons Construction Company actually submitted a bill to the Highways Department for \$5,400 for the removal of 360 cubic yards of ice from the cofferdams where concrete was later placed at the price of \$15 per cubic yard. Evidence established at the hearing before the Public Accounts Committee that the Highways Department had never before allowed such a charge as the same was properly chargeable in the lump sum of \$12,500 payable to the contractor for miscellaneous and overhead expenses, in any event was not provided for by the contract and should therefore not have been charged as an extra. The price which the Contractor asked for moving this ice was on the same basis as that paid for removing dirt for excavation of piers, and it was not until Chairman Robinson made a ruling that the contractor should be paid from the ice level for excavations that this extra was settled for the sum of \$2,000. This was a total loss to the province, and was only made after pressure.

During the hearing before the Public Accounts Committee a letter was produced presumably written by the Parsons Construction Company to Chairman F. J. Robinson as follows:

"As per your instructions, and pursuant to our conversation of this morning I hereby wish to set out the understanding arrived at regarding measurements of excavation for contract awarded to us for the construction of a reinforced concrete bridge over Weed Lake, South of Broadview, Sask.

"Owing to this bridge having to be constructed during the freezing weather, and being located in the centre of the lake that

the excavation would be measured from the present ice level as per instructions from the Government Inspector were to be driven at least two feet larger than the actual design, on account of the probability of having to enlarge the footings, owing to the presence of numerous springs and quicksands, that excavation and concrete would be paid for at the unit price for the full size of the excavation and the actual amount of the concrete placed."

Although this letter bears the date of December 2, 1914, the day on which the contract was awarded it also bears the receiving stamp of the Highways Department of May 14, 1915. If the letter was written on December 2, the day the contract was awarded, it is strange that the writer, Mr. W. R. W. Parsons should state that instructions had been received from the Government inspector that excavations were to be driven at least two feet larger than the actual design. If the date is correct the Government inspector must have altered the design before the contract was entered into.

Evidence given before the Public Accounts Committee showed that the assistant chief engineer of the Highways Department had made an estimate for a two-pier bridge including \$5,000 for the approaches of \$26,000 and further estimate for a three-pier bridge of \$30,000.

The bridge that was actually constructed was a four-pier bridge which cost \$54,000 with \$2,764 for extras and an additional sum of \$17,084 for approaches making a grand total of approximately \$94,000. In addition, the Government paid cost of material amounting to about \$10,000. The first estimate of the Parsons Company without tender was for \$39,543, and no mention was made of extras for approaches.

Although the matter of the construction of this bridge was investigated before the Public Accounts Committee when the above facts were disclosed yet no report of their findings was ever made public.

Bradshaw  
Papers

